New library automation system designed to make finding books easier

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The Post-Record

Finding books in the Camas Public, Fort Vancouver Regional and Clark College Libraries is becoming very simple.

Just sit down at one of the libraries computer terminals, type in what you're looking for and "presto," you'll be able to find out which library has the item, if it's checked out, and you can even put a hold on the item yourself.

The Camas Public Library will be closed for a week, May 18 through May 23, to automate their 29,000 item collection by putting bar codes on their material. The process, being done by library staff and volunteers, will allow patrons and library staff easy access to materials not only in Camas but also in the Fort Vancouver Regional and Clark College libraries. Washougal Library is a branch of Fort Vancouver Regional.

"With the new system, people will only need one library card to use all the libraries participating," Cindy Gibbon, library director at Camas for nine years, said. "There will be no charge for the new cards except for non-residence individuals not paying for the public library service."

The new computerized system is a joint venture of Camas, Fort Vancouver Regional and Clark College libraries that began several years ago with a grant project to see if automation program was feasible.

Gibbon said the grant was awarded by the Library Service and Construction Act, which administers federal monies to state libraries. A library automation consultant began working on the project and the libraries involved, including Southwest Washington Medical Center, decided to go ahead and do it.

"We went to the Library Board of Trustees and the Camas City Council and were able to convince both bodies that people would get better service if all the libraries shared a automation system," Gibbon said. "It allows easy access to collections and the people of Clark County can use the libraries interchangeably."

The automation system will allow libraries to know who owns what, Gibbon said.

The cost of the system is being shared by the three libraries by a formula based on the number of items each library has cataloged and circulated each year and the number of computer terminals being used, Gibbon said.

"All of the in-house equipment is being paid for by the individual libraries," Gibbon said. "The cost of the automation start up at the Camas Public Library will be around $211,000."

Bruce Ziegman, assistant library director of the Fort Vancouver Regional Library, said their cost for their nine branches is $2.1 million, which was made possible by the $2.6 million library levy voters approved in September 1990.

"All of our branches began checking out books on the automation system in March," Ziegman said. "Within a couple of months we will have a dial in service that can be done with a standard microcomputer and modem and patrons will be able to browse and look for materials from their home, school or business."

Patrons of the Camas Public Library will also be able to use the dial in service.

Washougal Library closed for a week in January to bar code their 10,000 item collection and has been using the automation system since then.

"The new system is wonderful," Alice Gabriel, head librarian at Washougal for three and half years, said. "The staff has taken to it like ducks to water. It takes the routine work of the prior system away and gives individuals a chance to use their intelligence."

Gabriel said the new system was wonderful service to the area schools, which will be able to use the library with the dial in service once it is hooked up.